

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO SUSTAIN AFGHAN ELECTORAL CAPACITY



September 22, 2009

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OFFICE OF SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

September 22, 2009

The Honorable Karl W. Eikenberry
U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan
Department of State

Alonzo L. Fulgham
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

This report discusses U.S. and donor assistance in preparation for the presidential and provincial council elections held on August 20, 2009, in Afghanistan, the first elections managed directly by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. U.S. and other donors have invested almost \$500 million to support the elections in Afghanistan. The development of a sustainable electoral capacity is critical to the success of future elections and to lessen future dependence on international support. This report includes two recommendations for the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan to assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in developing a sustainable institutional capacity of the Independent Election Commission.

A summary of our report is on page ii. This performance audit was conducted by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction under the authority of Public Law 110-181, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. When preparing the final report, we considered written comments from the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan. The comments are in appendix IV of this report.

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Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

SIGAR

SIGAR Audit-09-6 Elections

September 22, 2009

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO SUSTAIN AFGHAN ELECTORAL CAPACITY

What SIGAR Reviewed

Building institutional electoral capacity is critical for sustaining a legitimate and fairly elected government. Afghanistan will hold four major elections from 2009 through 2010. On August 20, 2009, the first two of these elections—the presidential and provincial council elections—were held and managed, for the first time, by the Afghanistan government. In 2010, the Afghanistan government will hold parliament and district council elections. This report (1) identifies U.S. and donor assistance and coordination of support for election preparation, and (2) assesses the assistance provided to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan electoral institution, specifically the Independent Election Commission. We conducted this performance audit in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C., from March to August 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

What SIGAR Found

The international community made available nearly \$490 million in assistance to support a legitimate Afghan election administered by the Independent Election Commission, of which the United States support comprised over half (\$263 million), as of August 2009. Lessons learned from the 2004 and 2005 elections highlighted the need for increased coordination to avoid duplication of effort and enhance the flow of information. To coordinate international support for the electoral process for the 2009 elections, the United Nations managed the majority of the international contributions. The United Nations focused on fulfilling the immediate operational and logistical needs, such as supporting the development of regulations and procedures and hiring of temporary staff, procuring electoral supplies, and coordinating security planning.

While the United Nations recognizes the need for capacity development, it has not established a long term capacity building strategy to ensure that transfer of skills occurs. Several donors we interviewed expressed disappointment with the lack of focus on sustainability and the need for a longer-term perspective on capacity building to lessen future international support. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) faces significant challenges, particularly for the 2010 parliament elections, because it lacks the resources to undertake future elections without continued international support. Conducting credible and acceptable elections not only depends on the integrity of the election process but also the willingness and ability of the next Afghan government to continue to build the Commission's capabilities so that democratic principles and the electoral processes are sustained. On July 6, 2009, SIGAR recommended the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan urge the United Nations to take immediate action to fill a key advisor position responsible for monitoring the progress of capacity building, sustainability, and exit strategies. However, the position remains unfilled, and there is no detailed strategic plan to maximize and leverage the substantial investment made by the donors.

What SIGAR Recommends

SIGAR recommends the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, in consultation with the U.S. Agency for International Development, assist the Afghan government to jointly develop, with IEC and other stakeholders, a (1) strategic plan to address national electoral capacity, matched with an Afghan budget and human resource structure capable of supporting sustainable electoral processes; and (2) request United Nations hire a capacity development advisor or appoint an executive agent to coordinate an overall strategy with IEC, United Nations, and major donors and stakeholders, for monitoring the status and progress of all capacity building efforts in Afghanistan. The U.S. Embassy Kabul and U.S. Agency for International Development concurred with SIGAR's recommendations and stated they will work through diplomatic and assistance channels to implement them.

International and U.S. Contributions for Afghanistan Elections, (USD in millions)

Type of International Assistance	Total Assistance	U.S. Assistance
United Nations	\$331.2	\$120.0
Bilateral	\$157.4	\$143.1
Total	\$488.6	\$263.1

Source: UNDP/ELECT and SIGAR analysis

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ABBREVIATIONS

IEC	Independent Election Commission
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP/ELECT	United Nations Development Programme/Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Strategy and Resources Needed to Sustain Afghan Electoral Capacity

This report (1) identifies the assistance and coordination provided by the United States and international donors in support of Afghanistan's preparation for the August 2009 presidential and provincial council elections; and (2) assesses the assistance provided to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan electoral institution for future elections, specifically the Independent Election Commission.

To accomplish these objectives we interviewed IEC managers, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) officials managing the Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) project, U.S. officials and representatives from donor countries and non-governmental organizations that supported the election process. We also attended coordination meetings and/or met with UNDP/ELECT, IEC, donor country representatives, and other stakeholders; and reviewed documents and reports analyzing and/or providing updates on aspects of the election process.

This report focused on the preparation for the August 2009 presidential and provincial council elections. We did not assess the security situation; providing security for the election was the primary responsibility of the Afghan National Security Forces. The results and conduct of this election, including lessons learned and women's participation will be discussed in separate reports. We conducted work in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C., from March to August 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology is in appendix I.

BACKGROUND

Afghanistan will hold four major elections between 2009 and 2010: presidential and provincial council elections held on August 20, 2009, and parliament and district council elections in 2010. Unlike the elections in 2004 and 2005, which were internationally-led and managed, the August elections were the first managed by the IEC, an independent Afghan institution. The IEC was the sole authority in charge of preparing and conducting the national elections in Afghanistan. For many IEC staff, this was their first substantive experience conducting an election.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1806 directed the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to lead international civilian efforts to support the elections, at the request of the Afghan authorities, by providing technical assistance and donor coordination, and by channeling existing and additional funds earmarked to support the process.¹ Within this framework, UNAMA established UNDP/ELECT to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the IEC for all electoral activities. See appendix II for the 2009 elections timeline. The UNDP/ELECT, headed by a Chief Electoral Advisor, includes an operations unit providing advice and technical support to the IEC. As of June 2009, UNDP/ELECT employed 44 international advisors assigned to IEC headquarters and 71 advisors at IEC's regional and some of its provincial offices.

¹UNAMA's mandate cited in Resolution 1806 (2008) was extended in resolution 1868 (2009) until March 23, 2010.

SUBSTANTIAL INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT SUPPORTS AFGHAN ELECTIONS

The international community invested \$488.6 million to primarily support the 2009 elections in Afghanistan. Financial support for the presidential and provincial council elections was made primarily through (1) contributions by donors to the United Nations's UNDP/ELECT project, and (2) bilateral contributions by donors for specific activities related to the electoral process, such as civic education. In addition to the \$488.6 million provided by the international community, the Afghanistan government budget included \$1.5 million to fund the salaries of IEC core staff and temporary staff for conducting the election. As shown in Table 1, \$331.2 million was pledged to the UNDP/ELECT project and donor countries provided an additional \$157.4 million in bilateral aid. In comparison, the cost estimate of the prior presidential and provincial council elections in 2004 and 2005 was about \$416 million (\$339.6 million from the United Nations and \$76 million from U.S. bilateral programs).

The \$331 million budget for the UNDP/ELECT project covered costs for voter registration and election administration, primarily for the 2009 presidential and provincial council elections. While the UNDP/ELECT project spans from October 2006 to December 2010 and was intended to cover the 2010 elections, UNDP/ELECT has not prepared a separate budget for the 2010 parliament and district elections. Appendix III shows a breakdown of the budget for the UNDP/ELECT project by broad categories. The majority of international support for Afghanistan's elections consisted of donor contributions to a "basket fund" managed by UNDP/ELECT. Twenty-four donors contributed to the UNDP/Elect project, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States.²

Table 1: United Nations and Bilateral Assistance for Elections (USD in millions)	
UNDP/ELECT Project:	
Voter Registration	\$102.2
Election Administration	\$229.0
<i>Total UN Contribution</i>	<i>\$331.2</i>
Bilateral Assistance:	
United States	\$143.1
Canada	\$9.2
Denmark	\$1.7
Germany	\$0.4
the Netherlands	\$2.5
Switzerland	\$0.5
<i>Total Bilateral Assistance</i>	<i>\$157.4</i>
Total Assistance	\$488.6

Source: UNDP/ELECT and SIGAR analysis.

²List of donor countries excludes 10 other countries and the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Democracy Fund.

United States Was the Largest Donor

The United States contributed \$263.1 million, or approximately 54 percent of the total amount (\$488.6 million) provided by the international community. As shown in Table 2, the United States contribution was made to the UNDP/ELECT and bilaterally through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition to UNDP/ELECT funding, several donor countries provided direct funding for specific election activities for the elections. The bilateral funding was intended to supplement UNDP/ELECT capacity and expertise, particularly in the area of civic education, public outreach, and media development. Some donors stated that the amount allocated by UNDP/ELECT for civic education was insufficient. Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands³, and Switzerland provided a total of \$14.3 million⁴ primarily for this purpose.

Table 2: US Assistance to Support Elections (USD in millions)	
Contribution to UNDP:	
Voter Registration	\$65.0
Election Administration	\$55.0
<i>UN Contribution</i>	<i>\$120.0</i>
USAID:	
Foundation	\$67.4
Consortium	\$58.5
Global Security	\$5.7
Other projects	\$11.5
<i>Funded by USAID</i>	<i>\$143.1</i>
Total US Assistance	\$263.1

Source: UNDP/ELECT and SIGAR analysis

Like other donor countries, the United States provided bilateral funding primarily for civic education activities. Of the \$143.1 million provided through USAID, \$67.4 million funded the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, \$58.5 million was provided to the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, \$11.5 million was provided for observation activities through non-governmental institutions and for air transportation, and \$5.7 million was used to upgrade security at IEC headquarters.

- The \$67.4 million USAID contract for a project called, “Support to the Electoral Process in Afghanistan” through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems is to be implemented over a three-year period from 2008-2011. The assistance under this project includes training and capacity building at the IEC. It also includes technical advisors to IEC departments for periods ranging from 44 to 110 days.
- The \$58.5 million contract with the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, for the period 2008 to 2011, is intended to strengthen the ability of political stakeholders to articulate, organize, and compete in the elections. The Consortium partners – International Foundation for Electoral Systems, National Democratic Institute, and International Republican Institute – work collaboratively to implement the Consortium’s objectives. The International Republican Institute focused on training in platform development, media outreach, and other skills to increase candidates’ confidence in the election results. The National Democratic Institute focused on promoting electoral participation by political parties, candidates, and non-governmental organizations; and tailored activities to address organizational capacity, strategic planning, and outreach to constituents. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems aimed at increasing citizen participation through such activities as voter outreach, press corps training, and other activities, as well as special attention to women, youth, and the disabled.

³The Netherlands plans to provide \$2.5 million but this amount has not yet been obligated as of August 2009.

⁴Approximate amount in U.S. dollars based on July 2009 exchange rate.

UNDP/ELECT Managed International Assistance

UNDP/ELECT developed a four-fold approach to support the IEC and the election process: (1) support the IEC Secretariat by having international advisors work alongside IEC department directors to gradually transfer capacity through coaching, training, and mentoring; (2) coordinate international assistance through the United Nations to avoid conflicts, program overlaps, and gaps in international support; (3) create two key cross-cutting advisory roles – Capacity Development Advisor and Gender Advisor – to ensure capacity development remains at the forefront of the UNDP/ELECT project and that gender equity and access issues are mainstreamed within the IEC ; and (4) continue to advocate for relevant legislative changes consistent with the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. A focus of the UNDP/ELECT project was to support the IEC in fully developing a capacity to deliver credible, sustainable electoral processes. According to UNDP/ELECT, reliance on the international community for election support is costly and unsustainable.

For the 2009 elections, UNDP/ELECT funded voter registration and election administration. UNDP/ELECT focused on fulfilling the immediate operational needs to conduct the August election, limiting their ability to devote substantial time and resources to institutional capacity-building activities. UNDP/ELECT activities included assisting the IEC in reviewing or formulating regulations and procedures for elections management; procuring and installing infrastructure, equipment, and other logistical supplies; recruiting, training, and managing temporary electoral staff; and coordinating security planning. Of the \$331 million budget for the UNDP/ELECT project, \$229 million primarily supported the IEC, the Electoral Complaints Commission and Media Commission for the 2009 elections; technical support; and the costs of a possible run-off in 2009; as well as broader stakeholder support for 2009 and 2010 elections.⁵ Prior to the elections, \$102 million supported voter registration, specifically the registration update exercise conducted in four stages countrywide.⁶

UNDP/ELECT funded observers to report on the registration exercise through the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan.⁷ The Foundation observed all four phases of the voter registration process and reported that there were some cases of under-age registration, multiple registrations by individuals, and registration of absentees, particularly women registered by male relatives, and other violations. Similar violations were reported in all of the phases, potentially undermining the fairness and transparency of the election process. Of particular concern, the Foundation noted a lack of IEC monitoring over field staff.

⁵According to UNDP/ELECT, the specific budget and activities for the 2010 elections will be submitted to donors following the 2009 election.

⁶According to the Afghanistan Compact, a permanent civil and voter registry with a single national identity document was to be established by the end of 2009. However, the Afghan government decided in May 2008 to delink the two processes because of limited capacity within the Ministry of Interior, security concerns, and implementation complexity.

⁷The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan states that it is an independent and impartial umbrella organization which has been established by a number of civil society organizations to monitor elections to ensure that they are free and fair; promote democracy in the country; promote public participation in electoral affairs; and help consolidate public trust and faith in democracy and elections.

While it was possible for people to hold multiple registration cards, according to UNDP/ELECT, indelible ink was used on polling day to deter voters from voting more than once. According to the International Crisis Group, an estimated 17 million voter cards were in circulation, and in some provinces, successive registration exercises resulted in more registration cards distributed than the estimated population. For planning purposes, IEC assumed the eligible voting population was 15 million. However, lacking a census or basic population data, there was no reliable way to reconcile discrepancies and increased the potential for fraud. In commenting on a draft of this report, the U.S. Embassy Kabul stated that, while indelible ink may deter voters from voting more than once, the most effective measure against fraud would be a reliable voter registration list linked to individual polling stations to eliminate the possibility of duplicate voter cards. In addition, the U.S. Embassy Kabul stated that failure to build an accurate voters list contributed to challenges experienced during voter registration and facilitated fraud and irregularities during the 2009 election.

The UNDP/ELECT budgeted approximately \$11 million, as of January 2009, for the Electoral Complaints Commission, an independent Afghan body established to adjudicate challenges and complaints related to the electoral process.⁸ The Commissioners consist of three international appointees of the United Nations, based on the 2005 Electoral Law, as well one Afghan commissioner appointed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and another Afghan commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court. The electoral appeals body was intended to exist only over electoral periods and complete its work within 30 days of the certification of results. According to a commissioner, the Electoral Complaints Commission was to start in January 2009 but due to delays in appointing them, the Commission did not start until May 2009 and as a result, the recruiting and training of over 270 Afghan officers was rushed. Since the Commission is not a permanent institution, much of the Afghan knowledge and expertise gained for that election could be lost, similar to what happened after the 2005 election. Nevertheless, the Commission formed a management structure capable of adjudicating a large number of complaints, as evidenced in its public reporting. In commenting on a draft of this report, the U.S. Embassy Kabul stated that UNDP/ELECT procurement practices contributed to the slow establishment of the Electoral Complaints Commission in Kabul and the provinces and that the Commission should be separated from UNDP/ELECT in the future.

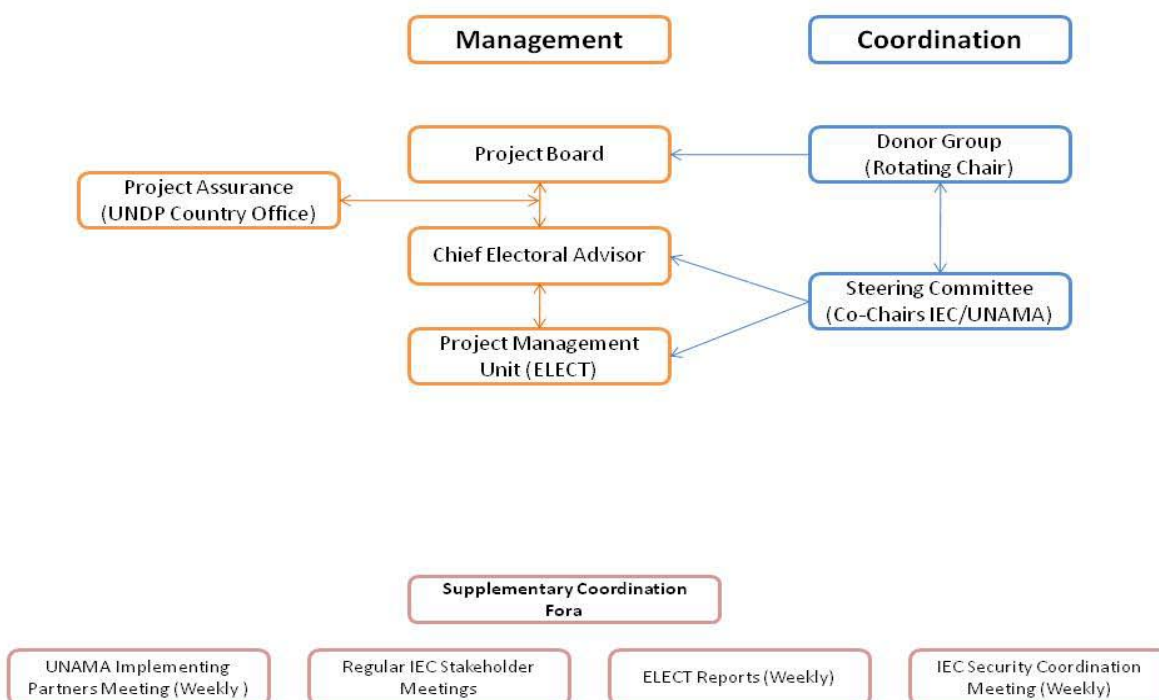
UNDP/ELECT Groups Established to Coordinate International Support

UNDP/ELECT established coordination groups to review project progress and regularly engage with the IEC on a full range of issues. According to UNDP/ELECT, lessons learned from the 2004 and 2005 elections highlighted the need for increased coordination among the various United Nations entities and donor partners to avoid duplication of effort and enhance the flow of information. The project management and coordination arrangement is depicted in graphic 1 below. Additional groups were established to coordinate specific issues, such as the Joint Electoral Security Planning Group, for security-related issues.

⁸Electoral Complaints Commission was established under Article 52 of the Electoral Law of Afghanistan.

Graphic 1: Depiction of Management and Coordination Structure for Afghan Elections

2008-2008 Afghan Elections Support Management and Coordination Structure



Source: UNDP/ELECT.

A description of the groups comprising the coordination meetings follows:

- The UNDP/ELECT Project Board met quarterly to approve its budget and budget revisions, work plans, and progress reports. The Board had overall management control of the project and was chaired jointly by the UNDP Senior Country Director, the IEC, and Assistant Country Director of Democratic Governance Unit. Financial donors to UNDP/ELECT attended and made decisions by consensus; however, in the event of a split, UNDP made the final decision.
- The Donor Group was comprised of political and developmental representatives from donor countries and met at least monthly. The Group was co-chaired by a donor nominated by the group on a rotating basis. Meetings were facilitated by UNDP and all interested donors could attend regardless of their financial contribution to the project. The Group was a forum by which donors exchanged information and provided advice and recommendations to UNDP/ELECT management.
- The project steering committee meetings were generally held monthly at the IEC Headquarters. It was co-chaired by IEC and UNDP/ELECT and included major donors such as the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan and the European Union. The primary focus was on project implementation issues.

- The Election Stakeholders Meeting, held weekly, was co-chaired by the IEC and UNAMA. It served as a forum for updates and decisions taken by IEC to key stakeholders in pre-election planning and implementation.

Generally, the coordination meetings appeared to communicate progress and share information, although some communication issues affected the quality of technical and managerial assistance provided. For example, in some instances, both UNDP/ELECT and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems provided support to the same department in the IEC. While technical assistance and managerial advice was provided by both UNDP/ELECT and USAID-funded advisors through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, specific capabilities and expertise varied among the advisors; and sometimes, UNDP/ELECT assigned or reassigned advisors without first communicating with the IEC department head, according to IEC managers we interviewed. According to these IEC managers, the international advisors that were assigned did not always match the skills needed. In commenting on a draft of this report, the U.S. Embassy Kabul added that the advisers to IEC were frequently called on at the last minute to compensate for deficiencies of UNDP/ELECT.

NO LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINING AFGHAN ELECTORAL CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

UNDP/ELECT recognizes the need for capacity development; however, it has not established a long-term capacity-building strategy to ensure Afghan electoral capacity building and transfer of skills. According to UNDP/ELECT's project document, staff retention, staff recruitment, training and operational tasks will impact on IEC's limited current capacity. The document further states that international advisors will partially cover for this inexperience however a strong focus on capacity development and skills transfer is expected of the UNDP/ELECT programme. Several donors we interviewed expressed disappointment about the lack of focus on sustainability and long-term capacity building of the IEC. One donor representative stated that there should have been dedicated resources of national and international staff to ensure knowledge transfer, and that UNDP/ELECT and IEC should have jointly developed a detailed plan, establishing mutual expectations and goals to identify what could realistically be accomplished during the election timeframe. Otherwise, according to another donor representative, donors will need to continue to fund the election process time and time again, particularly if broader capacity development concerns are not addressed.

In 2008, UNDP/ELECT and IEC management agreed on the need for a Capacity Development Advisor to provide direct management advice and mentoring to the IEC and ensure capacity development remained at the forefront of the UNDP/ELECT project. The advisor would be expected to continually monitor the capacity building and sustainability impact of the program; provide direct management advice and mentoring to the IEC; work with the team of international advisors to support and monitor skills transfer; and report directly to UNDP/ELECT management on the progress of capacity building, sustainability and exit strategies. The Capacity Development Advisor was supposed to be partnered with an Afghan national officer in 2009 with a view to the national officer assuming full responsibility for this role in 2010.

UNDP/ELECT planned to hire a Capacity Development Advisor but has been unable to find a suitable candidate for the position. In July 2009, SIGAR recommended UNDP/ELECT take immediate action to hire a Capacity Development Advisor with election managerial experience to leverage the substantial investment not only for this electoral cycle but 2010 and beyond. As of August 26, 2009, this position

remains vacant. According to the U.S. Interagency Elections Team, capacity building efforts were suspended until after the August 20 election due to the immediate operational needs of conducting the election.

The Chief Electoral Advisor, UNDP/ELECT, stated in May 2009, that the lack of a capacity development advisor did not mean that capacity development was not taking place. We acknowledged that international advisors worked alongside their IEC counterparts; however, there was no strategic plan that established mutual expectations in capacity building and measurable benchmarks on transferring skills and knowledge. Such a plan would have helped maximize and leverage the substantial investment made by the international community in the short time that the technical experts and advisors were embedded at the IEC.

Afghanistan Lacks Resources to Conduct Future Elections

While IEC's 2009 budget was approximately \$1.5 million, the IEC Chief Electoral Advisor expressed concern the Afghanistan government will have little interest or capability to fund IEC at sustainable levels between election cycles.⁹ According to a benchmark in the Afghanistan Compact, the IEC is expected to undertake elections in an "increasingly fiscally sustainable manner."¹⁰ However, the IEC is financially dependent upon the Afghanistan government. Continuing to fund the IEC is important between election cycles to recruit and train Afghan staff, build institutional infrastructure, and have time to implement any changes in electoral law. Following the election, the budget will likely be reduced, according to the IEC Chief Electoral Advisor. Moreover, IEC risks losing many trained staff due to a relatively low civil service salary structure.

The head of Information Technology at IEC was concerned about the ability to train Afghan personnel once the international advisors leave, and in particular, the capacity to operate and maintain the biometric voter registration system used during the registration update exercise. The system uses biometric software (fingerprint and facial recognition) and is presently operated and maintained under a one-year contract. There was no plan to provide extensive hands-on or comprehensive training for local nationals or financial support to continue operating and maintaining the contract, according to IEC.

The salaries, established by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, are generally too low to keep experienced staff. In IEC's Communication and Information Technology Department, for example, salaries have not increased in the last three years although the market demand for individuals with information technology expertise is rising. According to an assessment of the IEC by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, it is likely that individuals with information technology expertise will find higher-paying jobs.

⁹The prior fiscal year IEC budget was 35 million Afghanis (roughly \$700,000).

¹⁰The Afghanistan Compact is a government document that sets out detailed outcomes, benchmarks, and timelines for delivery, based on goals set by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. *Annex I* of the Compact, titled *Benchmarks and Timelines*, includes a section titled *Elections*, which states "The Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission will have the high integrity, capacity, and resources to undertake elections in an increasingly fiscally sustainable manner by end-2008, with the Government of Afghanistan contributing to the extent possible to the cost of future elections from its own resources."

To ensure the IEC's ability to conduct elections in a neutral manner, greater autonomy from the executive branch of government is necessary. The weakest aspect of IEC independence is the budgetary procedure and financial management of the IEC, which is almost entirely overseen by the Ministry of Finance.¹¹ To enhance its independence, the IEC Chief Electoral Advisor suggested the IEC have its own funding mechanism, separate from the Ministry of Finance and recommended establishing the IEC as a standard budget line item. This action would support IEC's independence, reduce potential for fraud and corruption, increase professionalism by retaining trained staff, and avoid the crisis preceding each election and dependence on international support, according to the Chief Electoral Advisor.

The cost of support for future Afghan elections will remain significantly high, according to an April 2008 assessment by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.¹² The aim in the 2010 polls, according to a June 2009 International Crisis Group report on Afghanistan's election challenges, should be substantive technical improvements and, more broadly, sustainable and widely accepted Afghan electoral institutions. The report states that strategic planning is urgently needed, and in the area of operational planning and budget, facilities and equipment built up for 2009 should be retained and decisions made to ensure Afghan budget lines and donor commitments are in place for the bridge period and the 2010 polls. Moreover, the elections should be followed by a wide ranging analysis of the process to ensure the creation of a permanent infrastructure and electoral framework.¹³

CONCLUSIONS

Capacity development intended to build and create a stable and effective IEC is critical for sustaining a legitimate and fairly elected government. Developing sustainable institutional capacity at the IEC will require the participation and coordination of the United Nations, international donors, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The IEC faces significant challenges as it strives to become a self-sustaining institution free from dependence on international support. Once institutional capabilities are established, the IEC needs to retain qualified staff from one election cycle to the next. Such capabilities will also be needed at the Electoral Complaints Commission, should it be established as a permanent electoral institution. Conducting credible and acceptable elections not only depends on the integrity of the election process but also the willingness and ability of the next Afghan government to continue to build electoral capabilities so that democratic principles and the electoral process are sustained. We believe a greater focus on capacity building will better position the IEC to fully assume technical duties and lessen dependence on international support in future elections. To prepare for the 2010 elections, it is particularly important to retain expertise and take action to leverage the international investment in the elections.

¹¹ *Institutional Assessment of the Independent Electoral Commission*, Rafael Lopez-Pintor, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Senior Electoral Cycle Advisor, September 30, 2008, pg. 20.

¹² *Assessment Report, Programme Options for DFID Support to Elections in Afghanistan 2008-2011*, Department for International Development, U.K. Government, April 23, 2008.

¹³ *Afghanistan's Election Challenges*, International Crisis Group, June 24, 2009, pg. 27.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To help build sustainable capacity of Afghanistan's electoral institutions, we recommend that the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, in consultation with USAID:

- Assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan jointly develop, with IEC, United Nations, and other stakeholders, a detailed strategic plan for capacity development. This plan should include mutual expectations and benchmarks for developing sustainable institutional electoral capacity; a commensurate Afghan budget and human resource structure capable of sustaining the electoral processes; and training and professional development for the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission, if integrated as a permanent presence into the election process.

To ensure that capacity building and transfer of skills occur between technical advisors and IEC staff, we recommend that the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan:

- Urge the United Nations to hire a Capacity Development Advisor, or appoint an executive agent to coordinate an overall strategy for building and sustaining electoral capacity. The advisor or executive agent should, in coordination with IEC, United Nations, and other stakeholders, monitor all capacity building efforts, including evaluating performance and skills transfer, identifying skill gaps and professional development needs, and addressing sustainability and exit strategies.

COMMENTS

The U.S. Interagency Elections Team and USAID Mission, representing the U.S. Embassy Kabul, provided joint written comments on a draft of this report, which is included in appendix IV. In their response, they fully endorsed our recommendations and stated that they will work through both diplomatic and assistance channels to accomplish them. They also provided additional comments which we have incorporated in the report, as appropriate.

In their additional comments, the U.S. Embassy Kabul underscored the weak management of UNDP/ELECT as a major factor behind some of the weaknesses identified in this report. They stated that UNDP/ELECT needs more transparency and needs to retain more experienced experts and advisors with technical skills. Further, the U.S. Embassy noted other factors for consideration to improve the sustainability of the electoral process beyond the institutional development of the IEC, which included reforming the legal framework, electoral system, and constitution. This report does not address such reforms, because the scope was limited to institutional capacity. However, we agree that these matters are significant to the overall issue of establishing an electoral system that can produce credible and acceptable results.

APPENDIX I: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To identify the amount of elections assistance and coordination, we met with UNDP officials to discuss donor funding and coordination. We reviewed documents showing the amount pledged by each donor country and the amount received, and we verified funding information from donor countries, including United States, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Denmark, to include bilateral assistance targeting specific programs, such as civic education. We interviewed officials at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNDP/ELECT and observed information sharing and coordination at regular coordination meetings with the donors and stakeholders.

To assess the assistance provided to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan electoral institution, the IEC, to sustain its electoral capacity for future elections, we met with IEC department heads, non-governmental institutions such as the International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems; as well as The Asia Foundation and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. We interviewed ten of 24 donor countries to obtain their views on the election process, in general, and specifically, on issues such as capacity building within the IEC. In addition, we reviewed various documents, including assessments and progress reports by donors, stakeholders, research institutions, and the IEC.¹⁴ We met with the Interagency Election Team in Washington, D.C. and Kabul, Afghanistan to discuss U.S. assistance and coordination.

We conducted work in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C. from March to August 2009. We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. These standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The audit was conducted by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction under the authority of Public Law 110-181, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

¹⁴The ten countries are (1) Canada, (2) Denmark, (3) Germany, (4) Italy, (5) the Netherlands, (6) Norway, (7) Sweden, (8) Switzerland, (9) United Kingdom, and (10) United States.

APPENDIX II: 2009 AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS TIMELINE

The table below shows the estimated timeframes for the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections in Afghanistan.

Table 1: Timeline for 2009 Afghanistan Presidential and Provincial Council Elections

<i>April 25 to May 8 - Nomination of candidates</i>
Presidential candidates nominated themselves at IEC headquarters; Provincial Council candidates nominate at IEC provincial offices.
<i>May 16 to 21 - Display of preliminary candidate list</i>
Display preliminary list of candidates at all IEC offices.
<i>May 16 to June 8 - Electoral Complaints Commission hearings and decisions</i>
Registered voters challenge eligibility of candidates with the Electoral Complaints Commission.
<i>June 12 - Publication of final list of candidates</i>
Following Electoral Complaints Commission decisions, IEC displays the final list of candidates.
<i>June 16 to August 18 - Political campaign period</i>
Candidates mount campaigns. Campaigning concludes 48 hours prior to the commencement of polling.
<i>August 20 - Polling day</i>
Voters go to the polls. Domestic and international observer groups observe polling and counting. UNAMA and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission jointly conduct political rights' monitoring.
<i>September 17 - Final results and certification</i>
After polling closes, ballots are counted; IEC announces preliminary results. After adjudication of any complaints, IEC announces final results.
<i>October 1 - Approximate date of presidential run-off</i>
If no presidential candidate receives 50% +1 of votes cast, a presidential run-off is held between the two candidates who receive the highest number of votes.

Source: IEC.

APPENDIX III: UNDP/ELECT 2009 BUDGET

This appendix contains information on the 2009 UNDP/ELECT budget for the elections, which was the basis for donor contributions. The table below shows the broad categories of the UNDP/ELECT budget.

Table 1: UNDP/ELECT 2009 budget

Presidential and provincial council elections (2009)	
Temporary staffing (including civic educators)	\$23,523,573
Election materials	\$25,664,064
Transport and Infrastructure	\$22,869,605
Communications IT	\$2,905,218
Gender	\$569,899
Public outreach	\$20,404,950
Training and capacity development	\$596,007
External relations	\$1,122,463
Media commission	\$721,210
International technical assistance	\$29,371,714
Sub Total	\$127,812,543
General Management Support @ 7%	9,620,299
Election operations and technical assistance	\$137,432,842
Presidential second round (2009)	
Temporary staffing	\$10,332,960
Election materials	\$4,893,788
Transport	\$8,120,211
Sub Total	\$23,346,959
General Management Support @ 7%	\$1,757,298
Presidential second round	\$25,104,256
Electoral Complaints Commission (2009)	
Staffing	\$2,838,958
Infrastructure	\$1,916,037
Transport	\$2,299,372
International advisors and support	\$2,494,756
Project management	\$719,293
Sub Total	\$10,268,416
General Management Support @ 7%	\$772,891
Electoral Complaints Commission	\$11,041,307
Outputs 7 and 8 (2009-10)	
Civic empowerment	\$14,000,000
Media training	\$4,500,000
Media monitoring	\$2,500,000
Targeting programming	\$5,000,000
Police Training	\$6,000,000
Candidate/party agent training	\$4,000,000
Domestic observation	\$4,000,000
Security Costs	\$3,050,000
OSS Costs	\$1,291,500
Sub Total	\$41,341,500
General Management Support @ 7%	\$3,337,532
Outputs 7 and 8 (2009-10)	\$47,679,032
Project management (2009)	
International Staff	\$4,595,335
National Staff	\$694,266
Infrastructure	\$1,861,880
Sub Total	\$7,151,480
General Management Support @ 7%	\$538,283
Project management	\$7,689,764
ELECT TOTAL COSTS (includes presidential run-off)	\$228,947,201

Source: UNDP/ELECT.



*Embassy of the United States of America
Kabul, Afghanistan*

September 16, 2009

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: John Brummet, Assistant Inspector General for Audits
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

FROM: USAID Mission Director – William M. Frazer
ELECT – Amb. (Ret.) Timothy M. Carney

SUBJECT: SIGAR Elections Audit Report

SIGAR AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings of the SIGAR audit were as follows:

"Developing sustainable institutional capacity for the IEC requires the participation and coordination of the United Nations, international donors, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. To ensure sustainable capacity of Afghanistan's electoral institutions, we recommend that the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, in consultation with USAID:

- Assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to jointly develop, with IEC, United Nations, and other stakeholders, a detailed **strategic plan for capacity development**. This plan should include mutual expectations and benchmarks for developing sustainable institutional electoral capacity; a commensurate Afghan budget and human resource structure capable of sustaining the electoral processes; and training and professional development for the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission, if integrated as a permanent presence into the election process.

To ensure that capacity building and transfer of skills occur between technical advisors and IEC staff, we recommend that the U.S. Ambassador of Afghanistan:

- Urge the United Nations to **hire a Capacity Development Advisor**, or appoint an executive agent to coordinate an overall strategy for building and sustaining electoral capacity. The advisor or executive agent should, in coordination with IEC, United Nations, and other stakeholders, monitor all capacity building efforts, including evaluating performance and skills transfer, identifying skill gaps and professional development needs, and addressing sustainability and exit strategies."

USG RESPONSE TO AUDIT RECOMMENDATION

Thank you for providing U.S. Embassy Kabul with the opportunity to review the subject draft audit report. We would like to express our gratitude for the professionalism of the audit team during the field work.

APPENDIX IV: COMMENTS FROM U.S. EMBASSY KABUL (p.2)

USAID/Afghanistan and the U.S. Interagency Elections Team fully endorse the major recommendations of the SIGAR report and will work through both diplomatic and assistance channels to (1) assist the GIRoA to jointly develop, with the IEC, United Nations, and other stakeholders, a detailed strategic plan for capacity development; and, (2) urge the United Nations to hire a Capacity Development Advisor, or appoint an executive agent to coordinate an overall strategy for building and sustaining electoral capacity.

(This report was conducted under the audit project code SIGAR-006A).

SIGAR's Mission

The mission of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction is to enhance oversight of programs for the reconstruction of Afghanistan by conducting independent and objective audits, inspections, and investigations on the use of taxpayer dollars and related funds. SIGAR works to provide accurate and balanced information, evaluations, analysis, and recommendations to help the U.S. Congress, U.S. agencies, and other decision-makers to make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions to:

- improve effectiveness of the overall reconstruction strategy and its component programs;
- improve management and accountability over funds administered by U.S. and Afghan agencies and their contractors;
- improve contracting and contract management processes;
- prevent fraud, waste, and abuse; and
- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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